

New baseball stadium earns 'bats-up' rating

Define ballpark junkie. Is it someone who tries to go to every park or someone who just enjoys going to them? In any case, we figure we've been to roughly 18 between us.



C.J. RISKAN



PAUL BEAURY

of Tiger Stadium was the ballpark came first, the freeways, a ball around it and Michigan Avenue had three lanes of traffic in both directions. Comerica Park doesn't have that luxury. Woodward is narrow and the freeways are close, but with no immediate access. Be prepared to use a lot of sidestreets and to be creative. **BATS DOWN.**

PARKING

Paul: Parking? There's parking? I'd like to say I'm kidding, but I'm not. At Tiger Stadium, you usually went to the same lot for every game because you always went there. At Comerica, you may eventually find that type of lot. Unfortunately, it might be the same one you parked at going to Tiger Stadium.

Good luck. Be prepared to walk. And if there's a line at the Fox or State Theater or Second City, well, *May the Force Be With You*. The parking gods won't. Two words of advice: People Mover. **BATS DOWN.**

CJ: According to material provided by the Tigers' PR department, there are "approximately 2,000 parking spaces" that were created during park construction, with 1,000 in an adjacent parking structure and a total of 15,700 within 15 minutes of the park. Or, as my cohort advised, you can park at that same space near Tiger Stadium and take a bus to the new park. My advice: That apparently empty lot outside the left field fence (furthest from the Fox) isn't for parking. Only go in there if you have one helluva SUV — that's where they're building Ford Field. **BATS DOWN.**

STADIUM EXTERIOR

CJ: OK. It doesn't have that lush, white aluminum siding that made Tiger Stadium so special. But it does have a lot of really neat Tiger stuff, like sculptures of Tigers with balls in the mouths on the outside walls. And there's a lot of brickwork that looks good now and will probably look even better when the park is finished — which, by the way, it isn't. There's a lot that needs to be done before this park is 100 percent open, and it won't reach that level by Tuesday. Three of the four streets surrounding Comerica were still under construction when we were there. But it does look good. **BATS UP.**

PAUL: Tiger Stadium is an old ballpark that looks like a warehouse in the middle of a historic district. Comerica Park is a new ballpark that looks like an old ballpark in the shadow of the old

Hudson's warehouse. When it gets finished it will be wonderful. Right now, it's still pretty impressive. My two favorites are the staircases at the main ballpark entrances and the Peewee tile around some of the building entrances. I like, I like, I like. **BATS UP.**

CONCOURSES

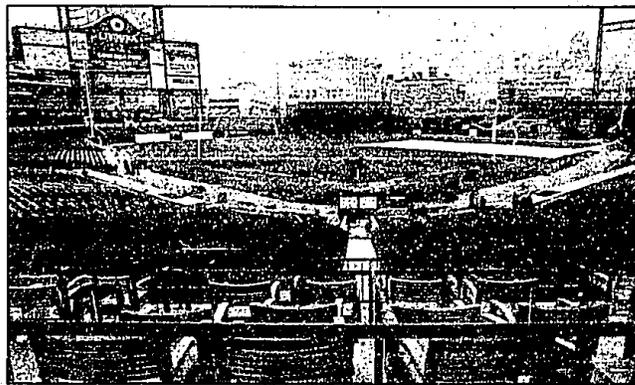
PAUL: One of the nice things about Tiger Stadium was the interior concourses. True, they were small and cramped. But that was part of the charm. You walked into the stadium and you were hit with the smells of cooking onions and hot dogs. The CoPa has large, wide, roomy concourses, which in one sense is a good thing. But you lose the perks and the coziness of a building. And with no overhangs and no true enclosed area, good luck on a rainy day. I like the fact there is more space, but it's too open, if that's possible. **CHECKED SWIND.**

CJ: Yeah, I'll miss that Tiger Stadium charm — the smell of the cooking hot dogs (or whatever it was), the enclosed, dark, almost claustrophobic feeling it gave you. And although it did protect you from the rain, I always wondered what was dripping on my head while walking through those lower concourses on a sunny day. I like the CoPa. The sights, the wideness, the easy access — heck, we could walk around the entire perimeter of the park! Couldn't do that at the Corner. **BATS UP.**

SEATING

CJ: There are, according to the Tigers' PR department, 30,000 chair seats, 3,000 club seats, 2,000 suite seats and 5,000 bleacher seats (total of 40,000), ranging in price from \$8 to \$75. There's no overhang to block views, there are no poles to block views, and you can actually see buildings outside the park from the lower deck. There are even (get this) cup holders at every seat (except the bleachers). And a guy can stand at a railing in center field and actually watch the game. And you can see most of the park from the lower-deck concourse. I like it. **BATS UP.**

PAUL: We made the trek to section 210, row 22, seat 2 — the furthest seat in the last row down the upper deck in right field. The last time I sat in such a seat was in new Comerica Park and the concessionaire sold binoculars and oxygen bottles. Don't need 'em here. The climb isn't as high as it looks and the sight line was much better than the worst seat in Tiger Stadium (throwing stands behind the poles out of the mix.) Wider seats (perfect for wider posteriors) and better sight lines make the Tiger Den seats with actual padded, widened, movable chairs (of course, at \$75 a pop and only available to season



STAFF PHOTO BY BETTAN MCKENZIE

The good seats: Comerica Park features soft, moveable seats behind home plate. The new stadium opens for business Tuesday when the Tigers play their first game in it.

ticket holders, they should be Barcelonaers.) Tiger Stadium seats were closer to the action, but this works well. **BATS UP.**

FOOD

PAUL: A \$1.25 beer and a Ball Park Frank for \$2.75? It makes Metro Airport food prices seem like Rally's. I know they have to pay for the stadium somehow, but geez. The food at the food court was OK (it's a ballpark, not East Side Mario's), but more dough in the buns shouldn't mean less dough in the wallet. **BATS DOWN.**

CJ: I'm a beer and a dog kinda guy, and I always treasured those served at the Corner. But times change and, know what? CoPa's weren't bad. It's just that there's so much to choose from — chicken sandwiches, fish sandwiches, gyros, subs, french fries, etc. The dogs they serve are thick-skinned, authentic conys, which is great. And you certainly get a lot of bun for the buck — they're huge. There are all sorts of different restaurants, including a McDonald's in right field. We ate in the Big Cat Food Court. It's good, but pricey — sandwiches are all \$6, beers range from \$4.50 to \$7.25, dogs are \$2.75 to \$3.50. **BATS UP.**

BATHROOMS

CJ: I remember going to see Mark Fidrych pitch in front of a packed house at Tiger Stadium. Went to the men's

room, waited in a line outside to get to one of those troughs inside, then wondered why since all these guys were just going wherever they wanted to. By the time I got back to my seat, I'd missed two innings. My sister was with me; the line for her was 3-1/2 innings. There are more bathrooms, so there will be fewer missed pitches at CoPa. **BATS UP.**

PAUL: No matter how hard you tried to forget, 87 years of ballpark memories had to include the sights, sounds and smells of Tiger Stadium bathrooms. The dung of your ancestors are a thing of the past. There are 462 of American Standard's finest at 25 locations around the park. This is not to say that people aren't going to have to wait. But it's going to be a lot easier. **BATS UP.**

DISTRACTIONS

PAUL: A carousel? A ferris wheel? In a ballpark? You, and it works too. It's out of the way, unobtrusive and blends in very nicely. Scoreboard is big, real big, so big that the upperdeck of the left field stands blocks out the Channel 50 ad because someone designed the board to go 30 feet too close to the stands (word is the Mike Iltch ain't too happy bout it). And there's an out-of-town scoreboard, too, for the first time in years. Lot of pieces to buy souvenirs and lots of room to roam. If you don't like the fact there's a carousel, then don't use it. **BATS UP.**

CJ: Let's face facts here. This park

cost \$300 million, so it better have plenty to offer. Since it appears the Tigers won't have an awful lot to show, distractions like a carousel (in the Big Cat Food Court) and Ferris wheels (with baseballs as gondolas) may come in handy. There are restaurants to sit in and eat, decorative pillars featuring Tiger trees, shops to spend all sorts of money in (yes, there are ATMs), and sometimes soon a waterfall in center field and fireworks for home runs over a scoreboard bigger than any in America. Unless the product on the field is better than anticipated, all of it will be needed. **BATS UP.**

OVERALL

CJ: It'll work well, once everything opens and parking spots are located somewhere within city limits. You can sit and watch the game, you can stand and watch it, you can go to a restaurant and sit and watch it. And, hopefully, someday soon, the Tigers will be worth watching. **BATS UP.**

PAUL: Comerica Park is not Tiger Stadium. Nor was it meant to be. And in today's time of big money ballparks and bigger contracts for less talented players, someone's got to pay for it — although I do have a problem with the fact that two Chicago-style hot dogs and two medium beers cost the same amount as tuition did per credit hour my freshman year in college. **BATS UP.**

ACCESS
CJ: Just 35 minutes. That's all it took to drive from our office (Levan and Schoolcraft in Livonia) to the new ballpark — and on opening day! OK, so the Tigers opened in Oakland. Still, the drive wasn't all that different. Took 156 to I-49 east to the Chrysler south and got off at the first exit — Mack. Took that to Woodward, turned left and voila! We were there. Signs leading you to the park all the way. Access is possible, but easy? Eh — doubtful. Have to wait and see. **CHECKED SWIND.**

PAUL: There's an old saying about how you can't get there from here, its latest installment is Comerica Park. While there are signs everywhere on how to find the park, you might want to bring a book, a good tape or maybe a handheld video game while waiting for traffic to move. One of the advantages

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